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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

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Introduction

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1. I have prepared the following analysis and comparison with the 1961 Laotian crisis as of possible utility in guiding our approach to the PRC during the present period of uncertainty concerning Laos. In many respects, the present situation is markedly different than that which prevailed in 1961. There are, nevertheless, certain similarities which merit consideration.

The 1961 Situation

2. The end of 1960 and the beginning of 1961 found the situation in Laos growing steadily more critical. On January 2, 1961, the Defense Department announced that President Eisenhower had given orders to "increase the readiness" of American forces in the area of Laos, and on January 7 the Department issued a White Paper urging free nations "to support and maintain the independence of Laos through whatever measures seem most promising."

3. The Laotian question was not discussed in Warsaw during the latter half of 1960, including the 102nd meeting on December 1, 1960, the last meeting under the Eisenhower Administration. The first meeting under the new Administration took place on March 7, 1961. At this meeting, the PRC representative, Wang Ping-nan, focussed on the Taiwan question and adopted a moderate tone highly reminiscent of the PRC's posture at the first meeting of the resumed series on January 20, 1970. He was clearly testing the attitude of the new Administration.

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4. At the next meeting on April 18, Wang took the initiative in raising the Laos issue, noting in particular that since the last meeting the United States had been "amassing large quantities of Marines in the South China Sea, . . . inciting the Chiang bandits in foreign countries to participate in Laos . . . and assisting in the civil war in Laos." Wang warned that the United States should give this question "cool-headed consideration." In reply, we noted Wang's failure to mention the constructive measures the United States had taken to bring about a peaceful solution in Laos. Ambassador Beam said, "The United States and its allies are seeking to bring about the establishment of a truly independent and neutral Laos, but will not permit that country to be taken over by outside forces." On May 12, 1961, the Geneva Conference on Laos was convened.

5. At the 105th meeting on June 29, Wang did not raise the Laos issue in the formal meeting, but in a most unusual gesture, invited Ambassador Beam to join him for coffee following the meeting. During the hour-and-a-half informal conversation that ensued, Wang, who was also a member of the PRC Geneva delegation, raised a number of issues in a very forthright manner. He obviously had been instructed to handle Laos in this context and voiced PRC support for Souvanna Phouma and the idea of a tripartite government including both the rightists and the Pathet Lao.

6. Wang pointed out that China had a five hundred mile (sic) border with Laos and could not tolerate a hostile government. Ambassador Beam stated that he was not competent to discuss Laos beyond pointing out that we required guarantees for a neutral and independent Laos through effective supervision of an effective ceasefire. The United States responded at the 106th meeting on August 15 with a similar invitation for coffee and informal conversation. At this meeting, Wang noted that Governor Harriman had said that he would like to have meetings between the American and Chinese delegations to exchange views on means to solve the Laos question. Wang stated that the PRC would not refuse to participate in any exchange of views. Apparently, nothing of substance relating to Laos was discussed at this coffee session, but both of

these informal meetings were considerably more relaxed and useful than the formal meetings. At the next meeting on November 28, a lapse of three months, Laos was again raised, but in a more stereotyped and hostile fashion.

7. Perhaps the most significant use of the private coffee sessions came after the 110th meeting on May 17, 1962, following the sending by the US of marines to Thailand earlier in May and the deployment of new naval forces in the SEA area. The two ambassadors met informally at Ambassador Cabot's invitation where Cabot, on instructions from the Department, voiced our concern over violations of the ceasefire and evidence that the Pathet Lao were receiving support from outside the country. The result, he said, had cast serious doubts on the intentions of "neighboring countries" toward Laos and had forced the United States to make military dispositions in the Gulf of Siam and in Thailand in order to protect our friends in Asia. Ambassador Cabot reported that he had tried to "make it clear to Ambassador Wang that serious consequences might really ensue if the present situation deteriorated further." He also noted that the whole atmosphere was considerably more relaxed and conciliatory than in the formal meetings.

8. Wang returned to Peking following the 110th meeting, apparently for consultation, and in the interim, on June 11, 1962, a coalition government was formed in Laos. Following Wang's return to Warsaw, he invited Ambassador Cabot to tea at the Chinese Embassy on June 23. He again had instructions to raise the question of Southeast Asia in a prepared statement. In the statement, Wang stressed PRC concern over U.S. actions in South Viet-Nam, Thailand and Laos and alleged that his Government had demonstrated self-restraint. He expressed satisfaction with the "three-princes agreement." Ambassador Cabot expressed the United States pleasure with the Laos settlement and expressed hope that it would contribute to a relaxation of tensions in Southeast Asia. One month later, on July 23, 1962, the Geneva Agreement on Laos was signed.

The 1970 Situation

9. Since the resumption of the talks in January of this year, the PRC has again probed this Administration's attitudes on

the Taiwan question in a manner strikingly similar to the approach in 1961. The discussions thus far have been confined to bilateral issues and have been markedly more positive in tone than at any time in the past ten years.

10. At our meeting on February 20, the Chinese agreed to discuss a "relaxation of general Far Eastern tensions," even though they did not become specific. Ambassador Stoessel proposed an informal conversation over tea following the formal meeting, and although the Chinese declined, they did so clearly because they had no instructions covering this situation, indicating however, that they would consider this matter further. The next meeting will be at their embassy, and it is not unlikely they will extend a similar invitation to us.

Conclusions

11. While the Warsaw channel has not been a critical means of communication for matters relating to Laos, it was used as a means of conveying special concern to the Chinese during a particularly anxious period. Those significant exchanges which have taken place have frequently been in the context of more informal conversations outside the regular meeting framework. It may be that Peking in the past wished to discuss more "sensitive" problems outside the Polish palace. While this problem is no longer with us, the Chinese may still prefer this "informal" approach on this type of issue. Should the President decide that he wants to raise the Laos question with the Chinese at Warsaw, I suggest that we prepare for discussions both in the formal meeting and at an informal tea session which might occur subsequent to the formal meeting. I would further suggest that we be as candid as possible in the second, more informal session.